

## COMPOSITION: HOW THE BIBLE IS PUT TOGETHER



*Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*  
— Luke 24.27

*From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation.*  
— 2 Timothy 3.15

### Launching Truths

1. The 66 books of the Bible are arranged by category, not chronology
2. The Bible is divided into two major sections: the Old and New Testaments (covenants)
3. The Old Testament revolves around Moses and his covenant (2 Kings 23.2; 2 Corinthians 3.14-15). The New Testament revolves around the Lord Jesus and his covenant (Luke 22.20; John 9.28-29), superior to Moses (Mathew 5.17, 13.52; Hebrews 3.1-6).

### I. The Old Testament

Within both Old and New Testaments, the books of the Bible are arranged by category. In the Christian Scriptures, the 39 OT books are placed in five categories:

- *Law of Moses* (Genesis-Deuteronomy, 5 books)
- *History* (Joshua-Esther, 12 books)
- *Poetry/Wisdom* (Job-Song of Solomon, 5 books)
- *Major Prophets* (Isaiah-Daniel, 5 books)
- *Minor Prophets* (Hosea-Malachi, 12 books)

### II. The New Testament

The 27 NT books are likewise arranged in five categories:

- *Gospels* (Matthew-John, 4 books)
- *History* (Acts of the Apostles, 1 book)
- *Letters of Paul* (Romans-Philemon, 13 books)
- *General Letters* (Hebrews-Jude, 8 books)
- *Prophecy* (Revelation, 1 book)

Paul's letters are arranged into two divisions: *letters to churches* (Romans-2 Thessalonians) and *letters to individuals* (1 Timothy-Philemon). Both of these divisions are ordered by length, with the longest letters placed first (Romans and 1 Timothy), and progressing to the shortest (2 Thessalonians and Philemon).

### III. Chapter and Verse Divisions

When the books of the Bible were first written they did not have chapter and verse divisions. Between AD 1227 and 1248, Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury in England, invented the system on which our modern chapter divisions are based.

For the OT, verse divisions are based on breaks that date from the work of the Masoretes, a group of Jewish scribes who preserved and developed the Hebrew Bible between AD 600-900. The body of their work is known as the Masoretic Text (MT).

Verse divisions were later added to the NT by Robert Estienne, a Parisian printer, in AD 1551. This was followed soon after by the first English Bible using both chapters and verses, the Geneva Bible, in AD 1560.

### IV. English Translations

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew (OT) and Greek (NT), with a small number of passages written in Aramaic (sections of Daniel and Ezra). Between 300-200 BC, the OT was translated into Greek (the Septuagint, or LXX). The Septuagint Greek Scriptures was the version of the Bible that most early Christians were familiar with and used.

Around AD 382, a Christian priest named Jerome was commissioned by the Pope to make a Latin translation of the Bible. This has come to be known as the Vulgate (from the Latin word *vulgata* meaning “common”). Over the centuries, the Vulgate was used in the Mass. It was made the official Bible of the Catholic Church at the Council of Trent (AD 1545-63).

Around AD 1520, William Tyndale began translating the Scriptures into English. His work became the first printed Bible in English. He translated the New Testament and part of the Old, but the Catholic Church did not approve of his work and viewed him as a heretic. He was arrested and executed in 1536.

In 1604 the newly crowned king of England, King James, authorized the first translation of the Scriptures into English. This became our King James Version (KJV). Because it was the first English translation to be authorized by a political power, it is sometimes referred to as the Authorized Version (AV).

In recent years, English translations of the Bible have multiplied dramatically. In general, translators follow one of three biases in their approach: word-for-word, thought-for-thought and paraphrase. For a fuller understanding of these three biases, see the web articles listed in the following section.

### V. Additional Resources

Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook*, First Edition, pp. 1-5

Wikipedia article, [Chapters and Verses of the Bible](#)

Wikipedia article, [Masoretic Text](#)

Wikipedia article, [Stephen Langton](#)

Wikipedia article, [Robert Estienne](#)

Dowd, Dan. “Types of Bible Translations.” UCG.org.

<http://www.ucg.org/vertical-thought/types-of-bible-translations> (accessed June 3, 2016)

A. Philip Brown II. “Translation Comparison Charts.” apbrown2.net.

<http://www.apbrown2.net/web/TranslationComparisonChart.htm> (accessed June 3, 2016)